

Worth the Wait

**A Message Offered by
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Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD. Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications! If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered. I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning. O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem. It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

Psalms 130 NRSV

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Romans 8:18-25 NRSV

Do you ever do this at the grocery store? It's time to check-out so you inspect all the lines looking for the shortest one, see how many items are in

each basket, factor in the scanning rate of the cashier, and then take a guess at whether or not coupons are going to be involved. All in an effort to avoid waiting. And once you've done this homework, what happens anyway? "Price check on produce, produce, please call register five."

If you hate to wait, we've got something in common. Several years ago I was in the middle of an incredibly busy week getting ready for Christmas, and I needed a haircut, badly. So I made an appointment at a local hair "salon" for the 45 minutes between two evening meetings at the church. I got there on time and waited twenty minutes just to get permission from the receptionist to move to the sink in the back to get my hair washed. With every tick of the clock I got more angry—why couldn't she have scheduled better? I got frustrated—I had planned my schedule around this haircut, and I had plenty of other things I needed to do. *I felt out of control.* Another ten minutes passed before the "shampooist" began her work. When I was done getting shampooed she put one of those towels on my head (which completed my humiliation) and then she said, "wait in the front. It will be a few more minutes, we're running behind." Something inside me snapped. I got up, walked to the front, ripped off the towel and just kept going. I couldn't wait even one minute more. It was not one of my finer moments.

If we're kept waiting long enough, anger and frustration can turn into sadness and depression. We begin to think we're not worthy of that for which we are waiting. Even when we are waiting for good things like love, healing, children, and jobs—what began as sweet expectation can turn into bitterness as the hope goes unfulfilled for too long. Waiting is no fun.

But it's a fact of life—there will always be some kind of waiting. Even if we figured out a way to have no lines at Walmart, Home Depot, or the post office, a whole lot of people would still be waiting for Mr. or Ms. Right. Or waiting for direction in life. Or waiting to feel the wholeness and peace that can only come from a close relationship with God. When we wait for these things we are waiting for *God*, and there's nothing we can do to hurry God up.

The person who wrote Psalm 130 knows something about this kind of painful waiting for God. He's waiting for forgiveness—for his conscience to be unburdened. Listen to how he describes his pain:

My soul waits for the Lord, more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchman for the morning.

Imagine what it meant to be a watchman in those days: you're on lookout; awake all night in the darkness; watching for wild animals, watching for enemies. You can't wait for the sun to come up. Dawn means safety, hope, and companionship. Minutes seem like hours. Some of you know what that's like, lying awake for hours, waiting for the morning to come.

At least the watchman knows that morning will certainly come, and he can count down the minutes. It's even harder to wait when we have no idea when our longing will be fulfilled by God.

It's so hard because God is not G.O.D. Back in New Jersey we used to see 18-wheelers advertising "G.O.D." in 4 foot letters on each side of the trailer. It got our attention. What they were selling was Guaranteed Overnight Delivery. They maybe able to offer G.O.D, but God does not. *On-time* delivery, yes. But *overnight* delivery, almost never. Most times God keeps us waiting. God is never in a hurry. Part of discipleship is learning to wait on God with faithful patience.

We can wait for God with at least three attitudes.

The first approach is to admit that what we think of as waiting is God giving us time to get ready. Let me give an example. How long does it take to get from Egypt to Israel? A few hours by plane; a day by bus; eleven days on foot. So why did it take the Hebrews *forty years*? Deuteronomy 8 explains why. Moses explains to his people who wondered why they had to wait so long, God did it

to humble you, and test you whether or not you would keep his commandments. It was to teach you that man does not live on bread alone. As a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you.

They thought they were wandering and waiting; *God* was making them into a people. If that rag tag group of slaves had gotten to Israel in eleven days, do you think they would have been prepared to defeat the inhabitants,

occupy the territory, and govern the land? No. It was while they were waiting that God gave them the law on Mount Sinai, taught them how to worship, and built them into a nation. If God hadn't kept them waiting, they would have rushed right into certain defeat.

Some of the most vulnerable people in the world are ones who didn't have to wait for success or love. We see it with athletes, movie stars, and musicians who flame out spectacularly because weren't emotionally and spiritually ready for success. It can happen to pastors, too. A fellow I knew when I was first ordained was one of those guys, and I envied him. He was younger than me and already had a Ph.D. in Old Testament (I could barely recognize Hebrew much less specialize in it). He was married with two kids (I wasn't even dating at the time), and pastor of the largest Presbyterian Church in Denver. When I met him, he was in the express lane—no waiting. I read about him a few years later. He was up on denominational charges for having an affair with a married colleague. Maybe it would have been better if he had had the patience to wait a little for his *character* to catch up with his *charisma*. Sometimes waiting is God's way of giving us a chance to get ready for something big. One pastor calls it, "preparing for promotion."
[Joyce Meyer]

But sometimes the time we spend waiting is the time God needs to get *something else* ready. It's like you're ready to check-in to the hotel, but your room isn't made up yet. This second kind of waiting is also for our own good.

Zig Ziglar is a motivational speaker. He tells of being in an airport waiting for a flight to a conference at which he was the featured speaker. As he was waiting he was already tense because the flight was due to land just an hour before he was scheduled to speak. So when the electronic board suddenly flashed, "Flight #309 has been cancelled due to equipment failure," a line formed instantly at the desk Ziglar was fourth in line. He could hear angry people ahead of him demanding that the plane take off anyway. But when it came his turn at the counter, in an uncharacteristic display of patience he told the airline representative: "I'm so glad this flight has been cancelled." The woman was stunned. "So you're in no hurry to reach your destination?" she said. "Oh yes, I am," he said. "I'm going to lose a bundle because of this." "So why are you glad to be *waiting*?" "The way I figure it," he said, "is you've cancelled that flight for good reason. I don't want to

be on any plane that you think might crash. I'm perfectly willing to wait while you get another one ready."

When God makes us wait we have to trust that the waiting itself is part of God's plan. The world is such a complex network of relationships that it takes time for God to get everything into place. Let me tell you this. If Kari and I had met each other ten years before we did, we never would have married. God did huge work in my life getting me ready for her, making me into the kind of person who is fit to live with (barely). We each needed that time to mature and discover what was really important to us. Any sooner would have been disaster. That waiting time was a gift.

And there's a third way to look at our time in the waiting room: God wants us right where we are. In the Gospel of John we read of Jesus and the woman at the well [John 4:1-42]. Jesus sent the disciples to town to get lunch while he waited for them back at the well. And it was while Jesus was waiting for something else that he transformed a wayward woman's life. Instead of napping in the shade, or complaining about what was taking the disciples so long, he struck up a conversation with the person in front of him. A few minutes later, she was the first missionary to the Samaritans. God can do amazing things through us while we wait.

Waiting may not be *fun*, but it can be *productive*. Maybe you're single and longing to not be. If so, maybe God can use the extra time, freedom, and resources you have to build the Kingdom. Maybe you are part of a couple with a kid-shaped hole in your lives. Do you think God can use you to mentor a kid – or "grand-kid"--who has a parent-shaped hole in their life? Maybe you're between jobs. Perhaps this is a time to invest in family relationships or go back to school – or even grow your relationship with God. God things can happen while we wait.

When we wait for God, we usually can't figure out why. For our own peace of mind, we need to trust that we are waiting for a reason, a good reason, a Godly reason, and that God wants us right where we are, at least for now. *Waiting* time is not *wasted* time when we wait with faith.

Next time you are waiting on God, ask "*What* am I waiting for?"

- Is God giving me a chance to grow into the person I need to be?
- Is it possible that God is preparing something or someone else for me?

- Is there something God wants me to do while I wait?

And, finally, remember for *whom* you are waiting. When I am waiting for a human being, all kinds of thoughts run through my mind. I think, “I’ve been forgotten”—because I’ve forgotten appointments myself. Or I’ll think, “I’m in the wrong place.” I regularly meet people at restaurants around town; more than once I’ve been halfway through a cup of coffee before realizing that I was in the wrong one. And sometimes I conclude as I’m waiting, “I guess I’m not important to him or her. Someone else is more important, so I have to wait.”

All this may be true with humans, but it’s never true of God. Turn to God’s word and you’ll see that God does not forget or forsake His people. You’ll see that you are in the place where God needs you to be. And you’ll see that there is no one on earth more precious to God than you.

Faithful waiting is hard work – we see others moving ahead. We think we should be moving ahead. We wonder when our ship will come in. We are tempted to give in. Waiting is hard, but it’s not hopeless. God promises there will come a time when the waiting is over. You will feel strong again. You will soar in God’s perfect will and timing. You will be energized. You will not be defeated.

Isaiah said it best when he said:

*Those who wait for the Lord:
Shall renew their strength,
They shall mount up with wings like eagles,
They shall run and not be weary
They shall walk and not faint.*

Isaiah 40:31

God is always worth the wait. Amen.

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